COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

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Scope

Community engagement describes the ongoing interactive relationship between Council and the community.

When Councils have a good relationship with their community, they are more likely to understand the range of needs and aspirations of the community and ultimately make informed decisions.

Community engagement encourages communities to be informed and to participate in the decision-making processes that guide the development of the services that the Council provides.

Aim

The aim of the Community Engagement Strategy is to strengthen and formalise Council's relationship with the community by establishing goals and principles for community engagement.

Community engagement is important for a number of reasons:

- Consultation with the community keeps Councillors informed of the ongoing issues within the community.
- Community engagement means keeping the community informed and involved so that Council can make better decisions that more closely match the needs and aspirations of the community.
- Closer relationships between the community and Council can lead to increased opportunity for co-operation and co-ordination of projects and services to improve the community.
- A community that is informed about, and engaged in, local issues creates a strong community.
- A community is more likely to trust and have confidence in the Council if the community is engaged and involved in it's governance.

Goals

Inform
Council will provide to the community balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

Consult
Council will obtain community feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.

Involve
Council will work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

Partnership
Council will partner with the community in decision making including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

Principles

Council's community engagement will be underpinned by the following principles:

- Council will communicate and consult with the community in ways that are sensitive to the needs of particular individuals or groups to maximize their ability to contribute.
- Council will encourage mutual respect for the needs, aspirations and opinions of all within the community.
- Council will keep the community informed about issues that are relevant to them and to inform them of the results and actions taken from their input into decision-making.
- Council will listen to what the community has to say, valuing and respecting all ideas.
- Council will present information in a way that is easy to understand and appropriate for all sectors of the community.

Commitments

Council will achieve the goals and principles of community engagement through the following commitments:

Leadership

- Development of a strong organizational culture of support for engaging the community that is encouraged, resourced and led from the senior levels of the organization
- Provide clear leadership by explaining Council's decisions
- Understand local issues and engage with the community in a proactive rather than reactive way.

Advocacy

- Develop good relationships with other Councils, State and Federal Governments and other related agencies and stakeholders to provide and effective advocacy role for the community.
- Foster processes within the community to encourage and support the community to advocate on behalf of themselves.
- Facilitate platforms whereby the community can engage both State and Federal Governments about issues that are relevant to those governments.
- Have a willingness to act on behalf of the community when they cannot act for themselves.

Continuous Improvements

- Share ideas, techniques, knowledge and experience about community engagement across the organisation and with other organisations.

- Create effective feedback mechanisms so that the community is aware of how consultation is used by Council.

Encourage engagement

- Develop specific strategies for effective communication and consultation, and make stronger links with those members of the community that are often not engaged.

Communication

- Develop better ways of communicating with the community about complex issues.

- Make known to the community the limits of what Council can do prior to consultation with the community.

- Flexibly use technology and other forms of communication that are appropriate to the message and the audience.

- Improving the community's awareness about the role of Council within the community including the range of services offered.

- Provide timely and meaningful feedback to the community about the outcomes of consultation including the impact on the community

- Ensure transparency in the way Council consults and its impact on service delivery through effective communication

- Ensure that all communication is plain and easy to read and understand.

- Provide timelines for response to Council activities that are appropriate to the community's needs and driven by community expectation.

Methods

- Use a variety of methods that are appropriate to the issues and to the audience being engaged.

Methods of engagement will include, but are not limited to:-

- Community forums
- Surveys
- Newsletters
- Promotions and Development Tours
- Section 355 Committees
- Mailouts
- Website publishing
- Focus Groups

Resources

- Acknowledge the importance of engaging the community and provide adequate resources to do so.

Planning

- Improve networks and plans with other agencies to provide better outcomes for the community.

- Create long-term plans for effective engagement with the community.

Partnership

- Create collaborative relationships with community organisations, private enterprise and public agencies to identify mutual interests and undertake joint ventures.

Identified Audiences

The following groups could be included in Council consultation processes:-

- Schools
- Youth
- Associations
- Farmers
- Sport and recreation clubs
- Council staff
- Councillors
- Aged persons
- Service clubs
- Key Aboriginal organisations
- Businesses